

about the size of their equipment, and drop her night-drawers on a cold tombstone for some frenzied legover with the beastly prince of the damned. And it's particularly unfortunate that this, of course, is exactly the kind of material that Coppola plays up in his turn. No place for sublimated eroticism here, or indeed sublimated anything: it's all tits-out, nipple-slurping, four-in-a-bed romps. Ironically, this is a *Dracula* that arguably ends up saying more about sexuality and its discontents at the turn of the millennium than its eloquent model ever did for the turn of the century.

But there are incontestably fine things here too, particularly where Hart's gone back to images, episodes and ideas neglected in the screen *Dracula* tradition: the Count crawling round his castle, the crates of earth, the novel's memorably strange and haunting obsession with transfusion scenes (complete with the original dodgy late-Victorian haematology). The log of the Demeter, one of the sheerly creepiest bits of the book, has for once been succinctly and beautifully transferred; and Stoker's fascination with modernity in technology and thought – Lucy's typewriter, Seward's phonograph, the medical use of hypnosis – has been picked up with fidelity and flair. This is certainly the first version of the novel to capture its remarkable Doylean sense of the exuberant mixture of science and pseudoscience that hung in the intellectual air of the age: "mesmerism, electromagnetism, materialization of astral bodies" are Van Helsing's examples of phenomena not yet understood. It's also, of course, the first version to make any attempt to transfer the book's complex, but masterly, epistolary and documentary polyphony, even at the price of deliberately violating some of the most sacred unwritten laws of cinematic narrativity. It'd be hard to claim the babel of voiceovers exactly "works," but it comes over less completely odd than it ought.

What Coppola thought he was up to, though, is anyone's surmise. Nobody could deny the movie's, erhm, stylistic bravura, and the undoubtedly strength and originality of its Steranko-guided images. But this is strictly Ken Russell territory, the unfailingly watchable but ghastly drivellings of genius, and it's been won at the cost of appalling sacrifices of plot, pace, and especially performance. Muffed climaxes, confusions or ellipses of motive and detail, and impenetrable portentous proclamations ("We've all become God's madmen – all of us!") clog the storytelling throughout, particularly in the final scenes; while as an anthology of world's worst film performances there has surely never been a single movie in which so many fine reputations have been so thoroughly unmade by such a relentless programme of miscasting, joke accents, and heavily-salted hammering.

The Harkers come off marginally worst, principally because Reeves and Ryder have each made the lonely decision to underplay severely and work terribly hard on inflection ("Heaugh's yeowr ecksint getting aoghn?" "Nawght teough well, Aigh'm afreagh'd"), while all about

them are energetically campaigning by example for the immediate institution of a coarse Oscar. There's a terrible virtuousness about it all, that virtuous terribleness that belongs only to the genuinely gifted as they self-immolate. It's a real shame, because a lot of the ingredients for the great 90s *Dracula* are undeniably here: an often clever and imaginative rereading of Stoker (though it's got to be said that words like "clever" and "imaginative" undergo an automatic currency devaluation at the border into Hollywood, and any serious comparison of this stuff with the likes of Aldiss's *Dracula Unbound* or Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* would frankly trigger the collapse of language as we know it), a firm but relatively discreet acknowledgement of the inescapable AIDS metaphors, and an acceptance of the need to absorb into the *Dracula* myth the new versions and new ambiguities that have emerged in vampire fiction over the last two decades. *Bram Stoker's* isn't that *Dracula* by a long chalk – I suspect it would need something very close to Merchant Ivory – but at least it's made ready a convenient bandwagon for such otherwise improbable upcomers as Neil Jordan's *Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire* and Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. And best of all, now everyone knows who wrote the book.

A propos, a much less conspicuous credit, carefully interred in the end titles of *Honey, I Blew Up the Kid*, awards "Special Recognition to Kit Reed for The Attack of the Giant Baby." It's pleasing to ponder what bloodied intricacies of savage legal trench warfare lie behind that marvellously grit-toothed phrase "Special Recognition," but I'll vow they weren't any too pretty. Given the *Honey* films' origins with the renegade nucleus of the fondly-remembered Empire Pictures – unchallenged mid-eighties masters of well-made, witty, cheap'n'cheerful video-oriented genre amusements – it's hard to be sympathetic to Disney's creative-rights lawyers here. The contract clearly specified bigger-but-otherwise-much-the-same sequel to unassuming family comedy about bringing up nutty boffin father; and it's been filled with exactly the kind of competent professionalism ("okay, we'll do War of the Colossal Tyke That Ate Vegas") that automatically looks to the pool of public-domain ideas for its material. If they'd actually wanted *Honey, I Turned the Dog to Antimatter* or *Honey, I Mutated the Social Worker*, or *Honey, I Projected the Entire Neighborhood into a Parallel Universe in Which President Ciccone Had My Love Child*, they'd never have got into the mess in the first place.

But even with fairly low expectations, this is disappointing stuff. Despite its resolve to go for enlargement across the board (corporate politics replace domestic, crossing the lawn gives way to taking out Vegas), an odd feature of the sequel is the large number of points in the script where expensive effect scenes appear to have been dropped from the budget and replaced at short notice by reported narration: "He put your son and the

babysitter in his pocket and left!"; "He grabbed the truck!" – "What did he do with it?" – "What do you think he did with it?" &c. Moranis, meanwhile, who presumably had more control on this pass, is regrettably required to be notably less nerdy, and there's a rather depressing attempt throughout to present positive images of twerpitude in father and son alike. ("I guess the world needs people who are different," opines the babe upon her extrication from jeopardy: "people who see things differently, you might say.") A great majority of the jokes don't really go off, the title's an inexcusable cheat, and it goes without saying that the actual plot is constructed from kit to a standard-package blueprint for a Disney family comedy – down to the full portfolio of one adult, one early-teen, and one child character and plotline to capture the maximum range of audience sectors.

This, as it turns out, is frankly optimistic; I watched this one with a paying audience too (a Saturday toddlers' matinee, which is just about right if you don't mind the youngest ones tending to sing along on auto every time Moranis breaks into Twinkle Twinkle) and I didn't hear a whisper of chuckle at the admittedly lamentable Rosebud joke. Still, there's still some of the first film's agreeable deadpan of dialogue and situation in the face of spiralling absurdity ("Wayne Szelinsky, you unshrink those policemen right now!"); "It's a helicopter – and it looks like a giant stuffed animal of some sort hanging from it!"); and I was quite pleasantly surprised by the Kid, who though insufferably cute and impossibly sunny-tempered in comparison with any normal 150-foot two-year-old is well directed and well observed throughout. You do have to put up with big holes in the logic, some unfortunate humour about Yugoslavia, much implanted father-son stuff about Dad's worthiness as a role model when he's a head-to-toe drongo from Mars, and some matching boy-girl stuff about how you compete for the lips of major babes without the assistance of looks, charisma, or personality. (A: catch her from falling 150 feet to certain death, whereupon she will announce "This is for saving my life" and give you a discreet taste of her lip gloss. Try it, guys! It really works!)

But much of the time it does manage to be funnier than you'd expect, and in the end it's only its very low ambition that prevents it from getting far out of the gate. You'd imagine that somewhere between *Dracula* and *Honey*, between "I shall rise from my own death to avenge hers with all the powers of darkness!" (subtitled, from the putative medieval Romanian) and "Remember we told you kids never to tell anyone you got accidentally shrunk and lost for two days?", there might be room for some mid-reach – for a new take on old material that falls somewhere between the extremes of obesely high camp and anorexically low concept. But the suspicion lingers that the Hollywood machine is shipped with just two factory presets.

(Nick Lowe)

She bolted through the door, slammed it shut behind her.

I stared at it blankly, then leaped after her. "You stop right there!" But she was disappearing down the third flight of stairs. I swore, and started after her. Old Mr Hinklemeier popped his head out of his door, and his eyes bugged. I was still naked.

Damn everything to hell and back.

Nadia was by the lake, feeding the ducks. I watched her for a while from the trees. She threw bread as she did everything else: with utter concentration, a kind of ferocity that did not allow for interruption. The ducks didn't care. They swam around and around, performing for their supper.

I stepped out of the trees, enjoyed the way her pupils blazed big for a moment when she saw me. Mine, I thought with that absurd proprietorship of the day after, and smiled.

She smiled back, and the day suddenly seemed brighter, cleaner. "Watch this," she said, and threw a single big piece of bread into the centre of the swimming ducks. One of the smaller ones, a mallard with a green head and flashing eye, thrust its way through the squabbling covey and snatched the bread. "He does that every time." She sounded admiring.

"Why not just throw smaller pieces, so they can all have some?"

"I like to watch them fight."

She gave me some bread, and we threw it in companionable silence for a few minutes. I did my best to make sure all the ducks got some.

We walked slowly around the water. Two men followed us at a discreet distance. "Are they watching us?"

Nadia did not even look over to see who I meant. "Someone's always watching me."

"They weren't at Talulah's, that first time." Or last night, in my apartment.

"That was special. It was my birthday," and she stooped to pick up a stone which she tossed into the water.

She had been all alone that night, just her and five empty beer glasses and the end of an evening. Her birthday. I wanted to gather her up in my arms, but she was standing so straight and staring out over the water with such concentration that I didn't.

"There was one in my apartment, earlier. One of the women that came into Talulah's last night." She didn't turn, but a shift in her shoulders told me she was very interested. "She must have thought there was no one home. I'd just come out of the shower, stark naked, and we stared at each other. I don't know who was more surprised, her or me."

Now Nadia was looking at me. I could see the pleats in her brown-black eyes, pleats I had noticed for the first time last night when she had been moving over me, running her...

"Did she say anything?"

"Um? Oh, no, not really. Just looked at me, looked at the wall, and bolted."

I hadn't realized Nadia had been tense until her muscles relaxed and she turned back to look over the water, relieved.

"Nadia, what's going on? I don't understand any of

this. First of all, you tell me not to trust you. Then guards with guns follow us about the place." I took her hand, trying to get rid of the awful fear that was suddenly hauling itself up my spine, one vertebra at a time. "They should know by now that you're safe with me, that I'm not some corporate assassin. I mean, what are these guards afraid of? And what are you afraid of? I really don't get this." Crooked Finger hadn't seemed upset to see me. If anything, she'd been relieved. "I don't like it. I'm not used to people letting themselves into my apartment as and when they feel like it. Even you."

Nadia didn't say anything. I sighed, and tugged her over to a bench. We sat down.

"Talk to me about this." Silence. "At least tell me how you did it, how you knew where to find me in the first place. How you managed to get through my locks."

She tilted her head back, stretched. The sunshine turned her throat to gold. "I told you: they give me everything I want; I have access to more than you can possibly imagine. As for finding you, that was easy. Kyoto-TEC have unofficial tendrils in every pie. I accessed the local IRS database and found there was only one employee at Talulah's whose first initial was K. So getting your last name was simple. Then I scanned the phone company's information for your address. Easy."

Just accessed the IRS database. Easy. Right. "What about the lock?"

"It's made by Kyoto-TEC. I found out what model it was, then asked one of the designers to show me how to compromise it."

Just like that. I wondered if she had any moral scruples at all. Like a child, she could have something, so she took it, right or wrong. And like a child she refused responsibility for what she did.

Children are notoriously fickle.

"I'd like a number where I can get in touch with you."

"I can reach you easily enough."

"I know. But I'd like a number. Just in case."

Nadia looked at me. "You don't understand," she said finally. Damn right I didn't. "I'm at everyone's beck and call, all the time. They whistle and I have to jump. I wanted, want, to have someone who won't do that to me, where I'm in charge."

"It doesn't have to be either or," I said, and took her hand again. "And you have rights. You could make them give you time for yourself, privacy, like you did on your birthday."

"That was different. They gave me the time because they were desperate: I wasn't able to work any more." She took her hand away. "Have you ever seen a swan with a lead fishing weight around its neck, choking? That was me. I couldn't dance, I couldn't fly with them wrapped around my neck like that. So they let me have a night, one night."

"Two nights," I said, and kissed her hand. She said nothing. "No?"

"Depends how long it took them to find out who you are, where you live. What time they managed to track us down."

I imagined Crooked Finger and her colleague crouching by the door, listening to my abandonment, and felt naked and furious. I wanted to march over